AL QUDS: Under heavy Israeli security, Palestinians leave the mosque compound through the Lions Gate here, after the second Friday prayers of Ramazan. More than 250,000 Muslims from Israel and the Palestinian areas had gathered for the prayers. —AFP

Palestinians stopped from rebuilding homes

KAFAL AL-HARETH (West Bank), Jan 1: The Israeli army prevented a group of Israeli peace activists on Friday from helping to rebuild two Palestinian homes which it demolished on Monday.

Troops declared this village, about 30 kilometres north of Al Quds, close to the Jewish settlement of Ariel, a closed military zone, and forbade entry to 25 activists of the "Committee against House Demolitions" and to journalists.

A military spokesman said the ban was for "security reasons."

The houses that were destroyed were home to twelve people, including eight children.

When the inhabitants refused to leave, the army used tear gas to drive them out before bulldozers flattened the buildings.

On Friday the families set up tents on the ruins of their homes and unfurled banners reading: "Is this a just peace?" They brought bulldozers to clear the rubble in order to rebuild.

In the past three weeks, Israel has confiscated thousands of acres in the area in order to pave a new bypass road to Ariel.

The army often demolishes houses that are built without permits. Palestinians say that they have little choice because Israel rarely grants building permits to their people.

Israel has destroyed nearly 700 Palestinian houses since the signing of the 1993 Oslo accords with the Palestinians, according to the Palestinian committee on land and the environment.

About 2,000 other houses have been ordered demolished, the committee said.

Another Israeli pacifist group, the Peace Bloc (Gush Shalom), said it would go to the village on Saturday to help with the rebuilding.—AFP